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MEMORANDUM

TO: Charles M. Andrews
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DATE: March 25, 2002

SUBJECT: FARM WORKER SAFETY OUTREACH THROUGH FOCUS GROUP
DISCUSSIONS

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) through the Department of Pesticide Regulation agreed to provide a grant of \$20,000 to sponsor a project that would initiate discussions on farm worker safety training and pesticide issues in the Pajaro Valley. The grant was advertised for bidding in November 2000 and Salud Para La Gente, a migrant health clinic in Watsonville was awarded the grant. Due to unforeseeable delays in the contract process, the project started late May 2001.

The project objectives were: 1) Create a forum to foster trust amongst regulators, farmers, farm workers, health educators, and other agricultural stakeholders by inviting them to participate in a focus group and 2) Develop recommendations and a training plan for farm worker educational outreach regarding pesticide safety.

METHODS:

DPR planned to hold four focus group discussions between farm workers, health educators, farmers, growers and regulators. The meetings were initiated to discuss farm worker educational and health needs concerning pesticides. At the first meeting, DPR presented data on illness surveillance and participants asked various questions about the program. The discussions then progressed to pesticide exposures among farm workers, farm worker families and school children in Pajaro valley. Growers listened to the farm worker concerns and appreciated the workers' candid comments at the forum.

Based on feedback from some participants of the focus group about a lack of communication, DPR met with the CAC, the farm bureau and the community partner Salud Para La Gente on June 20, 2001. After an extensive discussion about the project and the parties concerns, everyone agreed to open the lines of communication and make sure everyone is informed about any future meetings. It was also suggested that there be two focus groups; one comprised of farm workers, health educators and farm worker advocates, and another comprised of growers, farmers, farm bureau and regulators. This way, the forums will create an atmosphere of openly discussing issues without intimidation or fear of retaliation. DPR discussed the restructuring of the focus groups in length and decided to regroup the participants into two



separate focus groups as suggested by the CAC. At the final meeting, both focus groups would be invited to discuss recommendations based on both group discussions.

Before the second meeting, DPR staff participated in a telephone conference with Salud staff regarding participants and agenda items on the second focus group meeting. The agenda focused on pesticide worker safety issues in a "question and answer" format.

The second meeting was conducted in October 2001 and the group was comprised of farm workers, health educators and farm worker advocates. The project leader discussed the slight changes in the composition of the focus group and directed the discussions toward worker health and safety issues and farm worker training.

The third meeting was conducted also in October 2001, a week after the second meeting. Farmers, growers and CAC staff were scheduled to attend but only one representative from the grower's group and CAC staff attended. The discussions focused more on the CAC staffs' perspective of farm worker safety as it relates to pesticide issues instead of a farmer's or a grower's perspective.

After the three meetings, DPR staff met with Salud staff to outline recommendations to be presented at the final meeting. All the issues presented in the three meetings were discussed and a plan for an educational outreach on farm worker pesticide safety training was outlined. The recommendations were presented to DPR management and three options on farm worker training were realized.

The final meeting was held in December 2001 and participants from both focus group attended. The recommendations were presented and discussion focused on how to accomplish the training sessions with the resources available. The health educators in the group also added another option to the recommendations.

RESULTS and DISCUSSION:

The community partner, Salud Para La Gente was in-charge of contacting the members of the focus group. The first meeting was held May 24, 2001 at Salud Para La Gente and was attended by community members, health educators, regulators from USEPA and DPR, farm workers, and growers. DPR presented pesticide illness data from the Pesticide Illness Surveillance database, and then discussions followed regarding pesticide safety concerns. Several farm parents in the meeting expressed their concern for their children's asthma and asked if it might be related to pesticide exposures in the farm. One parent said she lived and worked in the farm while she was pregnant with her child. A week after her child was born, the child developed severe respiratory problems. Another parent stated that her son just developed asthma after smelling a distinct chemical odor from an application in the farm. Both parents also stated that their employers do not provide personal protective equipment nor are they aware of what pesticides are applied in the farm. They do not want to ask in fear of loosing their job. Another participant commented in strict confidence she heard from someone that some people are importing

pesticides from Mexico to bring in the US and use the pesticide here. She also stated they are used in agriculture not just for home use. The grower who was there commented that those farmers are the ones who give good farmers like him a bad reputation. He stated that those farmers should know better and any violation should be reported if anyone knows of it. Pesticide safety handouts were also distributed.

Due to a lapse in oversight, Salud failed to invite the county agricultural commissioners (CAC) and their staff to the first meeting. DPR then received a telephone call from the CAC offices and asked for information on the project. They also suggested involving the Santa Cruz county farm bureau during the discussions. DPR staff subsequently met with the farm bureau, Salud staff and the CAC staff to discuss the project. CAC staff suggested to slightly changing the focus group format to organize two groups. One group comprised of farm workers and health care providers to give a chance for the farm workers to address issues without fear of intimidation or retaliation. The second group to be comprised of growers, farmers and regulators to address pesticide issues from their perspective. After the meeting, all the groups agreed to keep everyone informed of future agenda items and other future plans on farm worker safety outreach and training.

The second meeting was held on October 2, 2001 also at Salud Para Gente and was attended by farm workers, farm worker advocates, community members and health educators. The agenda items specifically addressed pesticide worker safety issues, hazard communication and training and questions were directed to the farm workers. There was a good discussion regarding inadequacies in posting, lack of information on pesticide applications, the absence of hazard communication, lack of information on access to medical care, lack of protective personal protective equipment and language barrier issues. Some workers stated personal experiences on working in a greenhouse right after a chemical application, without knowing what chemical was applied. Another worker stated they were allowed to work next to an application and they experienced difficulty in breathing and felt stinging sensation on their skin. Others also expressed their concerns about chronic effects of pesticide exposure.

Health educators and farm worker advocates were present at the meeting and their presence facilitated information on who to contact for the workers compensation program, health benefits and programs for the indigent. Some community members also raised some issues regarding community health and pesticides in schools. Because the focus group objectives were different from the community health issues, those topics were not discussed in length.

The third meeting was held at the Veterans Hall in Watsonville on October 9, 2001 and was attended by county agricultural commissioners staff, a community member, one grower employee and a student. The third meeting was not very well attended. This meeting was supposed to be attended by growers and regulators. Santa Cruz and Monterey CAC staff was present and a secretary from one of the growers in Pajaro Valley. Agenda items focused also on pesticide worker safety issues and hazard communication consistent with the questions asked of the farm workers in the second meeting. Since there were very few participants in the meeting, only the CAC staff was able to respond to the questions and make suggestions on training the farm workers. The meeting failed to get feedback from the

farmers and growers about their training methods and issues on farm worker safety. The agenda hoped to extensively discuss farm worker training and safety issues but the participants only heard the issues raised by the CAC staff.

After the third meeting, DPR staff met with Salud staff to discuss recommendations for farm worker safety training and outreach to be presented at the final meeting. After review and further discussions with other DPR staff and the CAC staff, there were three recommendations to be presented at the final meeting. The recommendations were:

- 1) Grower-sponsored training. This type of training would meet the requirements for farm worker training.
 - a. Need qualified trainers – University, certified applicators, person qualified under the train the trainer program, farm advisor, county agricultural commissioner
 - b. Must be designed to meet the training requirements
 - c. This training should be approved for continuing education credits for private applicators
- 2) Educational forum. This type of training would not meet the requirements for farm worker training. This forum would provide basic information to growers and farm workers on various topics.
 - a. Bring in speakers from Workers Compensation, Department of Industrial Relations (retaliation issues), health educators, county agricultural commissioners, and Department of Pesticide Regulation to educate the workers on the specific issues identified at the focus group meetings.
 - b. This training should be approved for continuing education credits for private applicators.
- 3) Complement training at the annual Farm Safety meeting by incorporating training materials for farm workers. Santa Cruz and Monterey Counties sponsor this meeting annually.

The final meeting was held also at the Veterans Hall in Watsonville on December 13, 2001. The attendees were farm workers, farm bureau Board of Directors, county agricultural commissioners staff, health educators, community members and a certified trainer. DPR and Salud staff facilitated the meeting and discussed an overview of the project and the recommendations for farm worker safety outreach. Members of the group participated in a very extensive discussion of the recommendations. The farm bureau board members stated that their organization has several training sessions geared towards farm worker safety while the farm workers themselves stated they did not know that such training was available. The meeting became an avenue also for information regarding availability of training materials. In addition to the three recommendations, one of the health educators in the group suggested another option. They stated that the training sessions should also be community-based. They

said that when information is disseminated through community based efforts such as health clinics, the information is accepted and understood better. One of the health nurses in the group stated there is scientific evidence to prove that information given through classes in health clinics are better understood and assimilated by the participants in the class. The presence of a certified trainer (Max Curiel) in the group helped in bridging gaps and diffused misunderstandings during the meeting.

CONCLUSION:

After the final focus group meeting, DPR, Salud and the CAC staff felt that the discussions were very helpful in finding ways on how to start an educational outreach program for the farm workers in Pajaro valley. The recommendations from the discussions clearly reflect a need for outreach. Salud has an application for a grant with California Endowment, which includes a pesticide safety component in their health education outreach efforts. Santa Cruz and Monterey Counties host an annual Farm Safety meeting, which could also incorporate pesticide safety training for farm workers who attend. DPR has expressed their intent on assisting in both outreach efforts.

The focus group seemed to be a good forum for obtaining information on pesticide safety concerns. The focus group also became an avenue for communication between the health clinic and the CAC office. Presently, they have committed to keep each agency informed of any health issues that may have implications in agriculture, especially pesticides. It also created a small but significant step towards creating a forum of trust between the farm workers, farm bureau, DPR, and the health clinics with regards to pesticide safety issues.

PROBLEMS and SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- 1) The project started late because of contract negotiations and paperwork. The project manager was not familiar with the state contract process. Because of the cost of the project, Department of General Services rules state that the contract had to go out for a bidding process. Planning ahead and foresight on the part of the project manager will alleviate these delays.
- 2) Salud failed to invite the local regulatory agencies even though it was stated in the project work plan.
- 3) There was some difficulty in working with Salud staff probably because of the different objectives of the two parties. Salud wanted to make pesticide issues more apparent to the community and invited school board members and community leaders to the meetings. DPR attempted to make it clear that only pesticide worker safety issues were the focus of the project, so agenda items were changed to reflect worker safety issues and concerns. Because of difficulties in clarifying these issues, it was agreed that all correspondence would have to be approved by DPR prior to mailing. Communication is crucial in every

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aspect of this project. Fortunately, DPR took a proactive role in spearheading telephone conferences and meetings to clarify concerns.